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The Impact of Mental Health and Wellbeing on Effective Learning and Teaching

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BOOK REVIEW

The Impact of Mental Health and Wellbeing on Effective Learning and Teaching: A practical guide for those responsible for learners.

Editors: Hugh Smith and Amanda McGrandles

Scotland: Swan & Horn (2018) Books 1 & 2: pp 180, paperback £19.99 each or £30 for the set

Book 1 – ISBN: 978-1-909675-05-6

Book 2 – ISBN: 978-1-909675-06-3

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Closing the attainment gap remains one of the key challenges facing schools. In research and policy communities, there is growing understanding of the negative influence of systemic inequality on attainment, and of the impact this has on the mental health and wellbeing of families and young people. However, it is less clear whether such insights are being conveyed appropriately or understood fully by the wider education community. To better address equity in learning, educators need to be able to recognise barriers to learning and identify solutions. This double volume of edited work from Hugh Smith and Amanda McGrandles represents a significant new contribution to the subject.

Smith and McGrandles aim to provide a resource for teachers to develop a basic clinical understanding of a range of mental health challenges that a growing number of young people are facing and to consider a range of specific strategies that teachers can use to support young people who experience such challenges. These books are a useful source for educators themselves to reflect on a range of relevant topics such as stress, anxiety and work life balance, which can often be the catalysts of mental health concerns for teachers.

The opening chapters of volume one set a very good context for learning, illustrating the relationship between systemic inequality and mental health and wellbeing. By being aware of the 'bigger picture', educators may be more inclined to anticipate barriers and make suitable adjustments in support of young people's learning. In addition to promoting more empathetic approaches in support of young people and their families.

Each chapter thereafter focuses on specific clinical syndromes, disorders, and adverse family experiences. A highlight of book two is the clear differentiation of the varied mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety, social anxiety, depression and serious mental illness. With such language being interchangeable across society, this book will demystify the wider term 'mental health'. However, the real strength of the books lies in the range of practical case studies and activities. The case studies are well grounded and realistic, illustrating the often complex situations that educators are expected to deal

with effectively. These will form useful learning resources, both for continuing professional development of practitioners working with young people and for students in the areas of education and social work.

Many of the chapters outline helpful suggestions and approaches teachers can adopt. Perhaps, a little more consideration could have been given to the value of high-quality learning experiences as a means to foster wellbeing in young people. Informing practitioners of this aspect is more in line with their expertise and may empower a level of self-efficacy needed for transformation.

There are several ways this important book may be used as a practical resource. Firstly, it offers a means for teachers to develop a basic understanding of specific medical conditions that may affect young people and their learning. Most significantly, this book has the potential to help teachers become more intuitive when managing complex situations. Through sharing good practice, identifying common challenges, educators can arrive at appropriate solutions for supporting young people in their schools.